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Atari Online News, Etc.
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~ Win7 Still in XP Shadow ~ People Are Talking! ~ Price Drop for Wii!
~ RIM Launches PlayBook! ~ Spontaneity Is on Wane ~ Sony Axes PSP Go!
~ Tablets Replace Waiter? ~ No New Consoles Soon! ~ Hotz Donates \$10K!

-* Winklevoss Twins File Appeal *-
-* Amazon Failure Causes Site Problems *-
-* Spain Wants Internet Right To Be Forgotten *-

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->From the Editor's Keyboard
"~~~~~"

"Saying it like it is!"

The month of April is almost over, but we're still waiting for more positive signs that Spring is here. Sure, the mountains of snow that buried New England are gone, but we can't seem to escape the grip of cold weather here. Yes, my lawn is starting to get more green, and flowers and other plants are starting to grow, but it's been cold! The golf course where I work my second job has been open for a couple of weeks, but only the diehards are out there trying to swing a golf club. Heck, I don't intend to return to work there until the first of May, when hopefully, the temperatures will be bearable to work outside all day!

Not only does the weather still have many of us still down a little bit, but health issues are putting a drain on A-ONE these days. As you may have noticed, there hasn't been a People Are Talking column here for the past few weeks. Poor Joe has been ailing due to some undiagnosed condition which continues to render him extremely tired and unable to "function" at 100 per cent.

And, as I've mentioned over the past year or so, I'm continuing to be plagued with pain in my leg due to some degeneration of some of the vertebrae in my back. I've recently decided to try a suggestion from the neurosurgeon that I saw last year, and enter into a pain management program and get some cortisone injections. The problem is, I got the referral from my primary care physician, but the pain management department can't seem to find the referral - so I have to start all over again with the process. Gotta love the health care red tape just to get an appointment these days!!

So, I continue to find ways to be able to sit for any length of time before I get shooting pains in my leg, and hope to find ways to stay focused on whatever I'm doing at the time. Hopefully, in the very near future, both Joe and I will be able to put all of this behind us and get back into the swing of things, with no health issues to get in the way!

Until next time...

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->In This Week's Gaming Section - Wii Price Drops, New Wii Soon?
"~~~~~" Hotz Donates \$10K to EFF!

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PS3 hacker George "Geohot" Hotz has donated \$10,000 to the Electronic

Frontier Foundation, which supported Hotz in his defense against Sony.

Hotz posted a screen shot of his \$10,000 PayPal donation on his blog. "As promised, all left over legal defense money, plus a little to bump it to a nice number, has been sent to EFF," he wrote. "Thank you all so much for your support, without it, things could have been much worse."

Earlier this month, Hotz and Sony mutually agreed to settle their suit, and Hotz agreed to a permanent injunction against posting information that Sony wanted removed. Sony and Hotz were at odds after Hotz hacked the Sony PS3 and posted his circumvention technique on his Web site, as well as links for others to do the same. Sony claimed that Hotz violated the Digital Millennium Copyright Act (DMCA) by doing so, and that Sony would have suffered irreparable harm if Hotz's actions were not curtailed.

The EFF has not commented on the Hotz donation, but in a blog post after the settlement was announced, the organization suggested that the deal might "chill security research on Sony products."

"The judicial process should never be used to shut down lawful communication and investigation. Here's hoping future security researchers will refuse to be intimidated and that other companies will decline to follow Sony's heavy-handed example," wrote EFF's Corynne McSherry.

Hotz wasn't so sure that would be the case. "If you piss them off enough for them to pull out the legal team and their million dollar checkbook, worst thing that happens is you have to super swear to never do it again," he wrote on his blog.

Hotz won't be the one to piss them off next time, though. "As much as I don't respect the goons at Sony, I do respect the court," he wrote. "At the end of the day, something I take comfort in. The PS3 got OWNED."

Hotz did speculate how Sony will handle security for its next-generation portable device, codenamed NGP, the successor to the PlayStation Portable (PSP).

"I'm curious as to who Sony is hiring for NGP security. Lawyers? Get the code to sign a contract that it won't have exploits? You shouldn't piss off the community of people who are actually talented at this stuff. Hell, maybe you even pissed off your engineering employees enough to leave some nice backdoors?" he wrote.

Sony Axes PSP Go After Short-lived Attempt To Topple iPod

Sony on Wednesday confirmed rumors that it was stopping PSP Go production. The company in a statement said it had 'completed' production and was only selling remaining stock before it disappeared entirely. Firmware patches and repairs would still go on, the company told Impress, but the focus was on the NGP's release at the end of the year.

The Go first shipped in October 2009 and was conspicuously designed as an answer to the arrival of the iPod touch, whose Internet-based game economy was already cutting into PSP game revenue. It scrapped the slower and bulkier UMD disc drive in place of 16GB of built-in flash memory and the usual Memory Stick slot. Instead, it relied solely on

downloadable games. The slider design also was meant to make it more pocketable and appeal to those who liked the iPod for the smaller size.

The Go never reached the sales volume of the regular PSP design. Apart from Sony believing it deserved a "premium" \$250 price, the newer PSP was locked out of most of the catalog from before it was launched and didn't necessarily get downloadable versions on time. Sony even faced pushback from retailers that wanted to force it to use a traditional business model; it had already been selling coupons for individual games in stores as a way of appeasing chains like GameStop.

The iPod touch has been helped as a game device both by using more modern hardware than the PSP but also by having a business model that encouraged much lower prices on games, where even professional titles cost \$10 or less versus the \$40 for a full PSP game. As a smartphone-level platform, iOS has also been much more capable for web browsing, media playback, general-purpose apps and other devices that save gamers the trouble of having to keep multiple devices.

Sony, Microsoft Aren't Launching New Consoles Until 2014

Hope you're not bored playing your 8-year-old Xbox 360 or 9-year-old PlayStation 3 just yet.

Gaming blog Kotaku reports that Microsoft and Sony aren't launching a new console until 2014, due to strong Xbox 360 and PS3 sales.

"Both MS and Sony are telegraphing to each other that they're delaying, to milk the current [generation] and fill in previous craters better," said an anonymous source, who Kotaku described as an "insider who has worked with the first-party companies like Sony and Microsoft."

Microsoft launched the Xbox 360 in 2005, while Sony unveiled the PS3 in 2006. So based on the traditional five-year lifecycle of gaming consoles, a refresh is due this year.

However, both companies appear to be enjoying strong console sales. Last week, Sony reported that it has sold more than 50 million PlayStation 3 units worldwide since 2006, despite taking a reputation hit with all the PS3 hacker lawsuits. NPD recently called Microsoft's Xbox 360 the best-selling hardware system during the non-holiday months, thanks to the launch of the Kinect motion sensor. Furthermore, in March Microsoft announced that it had sold more than 10 million Kinect sensors since November, earning it a Guinness World Record for fastest-selling consumer electronics device.

Speaking to another "insider," Kotaku reports that Microsoft will likely push out Kinect upgrades rather than release an entirely new console. The source also said Microsoft hasn't decided what will be the "next big thing" in its next-generation console.

Does anybody? In March Nintendo USA president Reggie Fils-Aime ruled out 3D technology as the killer app in its next-generation console.

Meanwhile, there are many compelling signs that Nintendo is announcing its next-generation console this June at the E3 Expo in Los Angeles, suggesting a potential launch in 2012.

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A-ONE's Headline News
The Latest in Computer Technology News
Compiled by: Dana P. Jacobson

Amazon Failure Takes Down Sites Across Internet

Major websites including Foursquare and Reddit crashed or suffered slowdowns Thursday after technical problems rattled Amazon.com's widely used Web servers, frustrating millions of people who couldn't access their favorite sites.

Though better known for selling books, DVDs and other consumer goods, Amazon also rents out space on huge computer servers that run many websites and other online services.

The problems began at an Amazon data center near Dulles Airport outside Washington and persisted into the afternoon. The failures were widespread, but they varied in severity.

HootSuite, which lets users monitor Twitter and other social networks more easily, was down completely, as was questions-and-answers site Quora.

The location-sharing social network Foursquare experienced glitches, while the news-sharing site Reddit was in "emergency read-only mode."

Many other companies that use Amazon Web Services, like Netflix Inc. and Zynga Inc., which runs Facebook games, appeared to be unscathed. Amazon has at least one other major data center that stayed up, in California.

It's not uncommon for Internet services to become inaccessible due to technical problems, sometimes for hours or even days. But Thursday's outages were notable because Amazon's servers are so commonly used, meaning many sites went down at once.

Amazon did not respond to requests for comment. It has not revealed how many companies use its Web services or how many were affected by the outage.

No one knew for sure how many people were inconvenienced, but the services affected are used by millions.

Amazon Web Services provide "cloud" or utility-style computing in which customers pay only for the computing power and storage they need, on remote computers.

Seattle-based Amazon has big plans for AWS. Although it now makes up just a few percent of the company's revenue, CEO Jeff Bezos said last year that it could eventually be as large as Amazon's retail business. Competitors include Rackspace Hosting Inc. and Microsoft Corp.'s Azure platform.

Some people consider cloud computing more reliable than conventional hosting services in which a small company might rent a handful of computers in a data center.

If one of them malfunctions, the failure can take down a website. But "clouds" like AWS use vast banks of computers. If one fails, the tasks that it performs, such as running a website or a game, can immediately be taken over by others.

When a company needs more capacity, maybe because of a surge in visitors to its website, it only takes minutes to rent more computers from Amazon.

But cloud computing isn't immune to failure, either.

Lydia Leong, an analyst for the tech research firm Gartner, said that judging by details posted on Amazon's AWS status page, a network connection failed Thursday morning, triggering an automatic recovery mechanism that then also failed.

Amazon's computers are divided into groups that are supposed to be independent of each other. If one group fails, others should stay up. And customers are encouraged to spread the computers they rent over several groups to ensure reliable service. But Thursday's problem took out many groups simultaneously.

Outages with Amazon's services are rare but not unprecedented. In 2008, several companies lost access to their own files for about two hours when one of Amazon's data centers failed. The companies included DigitalChalk Inc., which delivers multimedia training over the Web.

In general, Amazon Web Services have been more reliable and, above all, cheaper than many other hosting systems, said Josh Cochrane, vice president of product development at Palo Alto Software in Eugene, Ore.

But the firm's websites and Web-based applications that create business plans were all brought down by Thursday's crash.

"It's a pretty vulnerable feeling," he said. "This is a really big message to us that we need to revisit our strategy."

That might include spreading the applications more widely over Amazon's network, so that problems at one data center won't bring down everything, he said.

Amazon engineers struggled throughout the day to rectify the problem. Leong said the problems are of a type that's not covered by Amazon's money-back guarantees.

Winklevoss Twins Appeal (Again) for More Facebook Cash

The Winklevoss twins are not ready to give up their fight for Facebook. One week after a judge ruled against them, Cameron and Tyler Winklevoss have once again appealed the decision.

"American courts have long held that a settlement agreement procured by fraud may be rescinded," the duo's lawyers wrote in the filing.

As fans of "The Social Network" might recall, the Winklevoss twins -or the Winkelvii as they are known in some circles - claim that Mark Zuckerberg stole the idea for Facebook from them, and they are therefore entitled to a piece of the Facebook pie. In 2008, the two sides agreed to a \$65 million deal whereby the twins would get a \$20 million chunk of change, plus a stake in the company worth \$45 million.

The number of shares issued to the Winkelvii was based on a \$15 billion valuation cited when Microsoft invested \$240 million in the company back in 2007, putting the per-share value at \$35.90. But the twins said Facebook's own expert valuation put the per-stock value at \$8.88, unbeknownst to them. "Had [the Winklevii] known of the \$8.88 valuation, they would have challenged the \$35.90 value on which Facebook's settlement offer was based," according to the filing - and presumably obtained more shares.

As a result, the twins claimed the deal was a fraud. Facebook turned to the courts, and in June 2008, U.S. District Judge James Ware sided with Facebook.

The twins again appealed, but last week, the 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals again agreed with Facebook.

In their latest appeal, the twins claim that Facebook's valuation scheme is securities fraud. "Rescinding a securities transaction on the ground of fraud is hardly 'backing out,' they argued.

"The opinion's implication that [the Winklevoss twins] should take the nowmore-valuable stock and stop complaining about Facebook's blatant violation of Rule 10b-5 inappropriately minimizes federal securities laws that command honest dealing and full disclosure in the sale or exchange of securities," according to the filing.

"Whether Appellants would be better off financially keeping the proceeds of the settlement rather than rescinding and proceeding with their lawsuit against Facebook is a personal judgment for them - not an appellate court - to make," they said.

RIM Launches PlayBook But Fans Don't Play Along

Research In Motion's PlayBook tablet computer launched in thousands of stores on Tuesday and mostly stayed there, a grim reminder of Apple's lasting allure for tech-hungry consumers.

By mid-afternoon, two carriers and two electronic stores in one of downtown Toronto's main shopping malls - where long lines greeted last month's iPad 2 launch - had stock available. Each started the day with no more than 5 PlayBooks.

"It's going to be a tough sell to the consumer," BGC Partner analyst Colin Gillis said of the tablet, a sleek but flawed gadget that doesn't yet offer the secure email that is the trademark of RIM's ubiquitous BlackBerry.

RIM, which has priced the PlayBook to match the iPad, has struggled to win consumer fans since Apple's iPhone and a slew of devices running

Google's Android entered the smartphone fray.

But reviewers panned the PlayBook for the absence of inbuilt email and organizer functions - the gadget needs a BlackBerry to access those - and said it appeared to have been rushed to market before it was ready.

The stakes could not be higher for RIM, whose security-focused BlackBerry once reigned supreme in financial, corporate and government circles. Its shares closed almost 3 percent lower at \$53.22 on the Nasdaq.

RIM must now persuade its corporate base to ignore the poor consumer turnout and scathing reviews and see the merit in a powerful new operating system and complex arrangement that retains RIM's famed BlackBerry security.

"When RIM launches a tablet they have the luxury of knowing there is at least some guaranteed demand from the enterprise," said Morgan Keegan analyst Tavis McCourt. Limited supply and lack of major advertising hinted RIM was easing into the launch, he added.

Adding to a feeling that the launch was not thought through, AT&T, the second largest U.S. carrier, said it was still testing the secure Bridge software that lets BlackBerry users get email and other services on the larger PlayBook screen without incurring additional fees.

"We just got the app for testing. Before we make it available to our customers we want to make sure we deliver the type of experience our customers would expect," AT&T spokesman Mark Siegel said. "We have to test this app."

The PlayBook launch, more than a year after Apple created the tablet market, was in stark contrast to the frenzy when Apple launched its iPad 2 a month ago and consumers lined up overnight to buy the gadget.

Apple sold almost 15 million iPads in 2010; RIM is expected to move 3 million PlayBooks in a similar window in 2011, according to 18 analysts polled by Reuters.

Analysts say RIM should stay in the hunt with the PlayBook despite the slow start, as it overhauls its creaky platform with the QNX operating system it acquired last year. The Canadian company expects large businesses to buy PlayBooks in "the tens of thousands."

Gartner, a research outfit focused on technology, estimates one in 10 tablets sold in 2015, or some 30 million, will be powered by QNX, which will likely find its way onto RIM's smartphones in the next 12 months.

That would place it third behind Apple at almost half the market and Android at just under 40 percent, leaving little room for Hewlett-Packard's soon-to-launch WebOS tablet and completely ignoring a possible Windows tablet platform.

Retailers say solid pre-orders suggest there will be pent-up demand for a capable alternative to the iPad.

"Based on those numbers coming in, we expect it to be successful," said Steve Coffin, operations manager at a Future Shop big box store near Toronto's financial district, dismissing the absence of lines of eager shoppers when doors opened and highlighting strong pre-orders.

Cellular-connected versions of the PlayBook are due out later in the year.

"It's not going to be in the same league as the iPad," said Al Hilwa, a Seattle-based analyst at IDC. "The question is will it sell more than the Xoom but less than the Galaxy," he added, referring to Android-based tablets from Motorola Mobility and Samsung.

Internet 'Right To Be Forgotten' Debate Hits Spain

Their ranks include a plastic surgeon, a prison guard and a high school principal. All are Spanish, but have little else in common except this: They want old Internet references about them that pop up in Google searches wiped away.

In a case that Google Inc. and privacy experts call a first of its kind, Spain's Data Protection Agency has ordered the search engine giant to remove links to material on about 90 people. The information was published years or even decades ago but is available to anyone via simple searches.

Scores of Spaniards lay claim to a "Right to be Forgotten" because public information once hard to get is now so easy to find on the Internet. Google has decided to challenge the orders and has appealed five cases so far this year to the National Court.

Some of the information is embarrassing, some seems downright banal. A few cases involve lawsuits that found life online through news reports, but whose dismissals were ignored by media and never appeared on the Internet. Others concern administrative decisions published in official regional gazettes.

In all cases, the plaintiffs petitioned the agency individually to get information about them taken down.

And while Spain is backing the individuals suing to get links taken down, experts say a victory for the plaintiffs could create a troubling precedent by restricting access to public information.

The issue isn't a new one for Google, whose search engine has become a widely used tool for learning about the backgrounds about potential mates, neighbors and co-workers. What it shows can affect romantic relationships, friendships and careers.

For that reason, Google regularly receives pleas asking that it remove links to embarrassing information from its search index or least ensure the material is buried in the back pages of its results. The company, based in Mountain View, Calif., almost always refuses in order to preserve the integrity of its index.

A final decision on Spain's case could take months or even years because appeals can be made to higher courts. Still, the ongoing fight in Spain is likely to gain more prominence because the European Commission this year is expected to craft controversial legislation to give people more power to delete personal information they previously posted online.

"This is just the beginning, this right to be forgotten, but it's going

to be much more important in the future," said Artemi Rallo, director of the Spanish Data Protection Agency. "Google is just 15 years old, the Internet is barely a generation old and they are beginning to detect problems that affect privacy. More and more people are going to see things on the Internet that they don't want to be there."

Many details about the Spaniards taking on Google via the government are shrouded in secrecy to protect the privacy of the plaintiffs. But the case of plastic surgeon Hugo Guidotti vividly illustrates the debate.

In Google searches, the first link that pops up is his clinic, complete with pictures of a bare-breasted woman and a muscular man as evidence of what plastic surgery can do for clients. But the second link takes readers to a 1991 story in Spain's leading El Pais newspaper about a woman who sued him for the equivalent of euro5 million for a breast job that she said went bad.

At 18 Months, Windows 7 Still Living in WinXP's Shadow

On the 18-month anniversary of the launch of Windows 7, Microsoft reported Friday that its flagship operating system has sold more than 350 million licenses. Its market share, though, still pales in comparison to Windows XP.

In a blog post, the company emphasized the business cases for companies to transition over to the new operating system, and launched a dedicated customer showcase page to highlight customers like Tsingtao, Energizer, and the City of Miami, and their success stories with their transitions over to Windows 7.

The numbers for Windows 7 at the 18-month mark show that Microsoft's sales of Windows 7 have plateaued somewhat; at the one-year mark, Microsoft announced that 240 million licenses of Windows 7 had been sold. Microsoft did not release sales figures for the first six months of Windows 7.

On the other hand, the market share of Windows 7 has steadily increased; according to Net Applications, the market share of Windows 7 now stands at 24.17 percent for the month of March, inching ahead a percentage point or two since May 2010, when it recorded a 12.68 percent share. Windows 7 doesn't appear like it will upend Windows XP anytime soon, however; WinXP's market share still stands at 54.39 percent of the market, and dipped only about a percentage point in the first three months of 2011.

Windows Vista, however, has steadily if slowly declined to 10.56 percent.

Microsoft, however, has attempted to place Windows 7 in the context of a "positive and productive experience". "Analyst firms like IDC estimate that more than 90% of businesses are currently in progress with their Windows 7 migrations," Microsoft's Brandon LeBlanc wrote in his blog post. "And we've seen that companies who have deployed Windows 7 save an average of \$140 per PC per year - showing a 131% return on investment in just more than 12 months.

Meanwhile, some have already begun looking ahead to Windows 8, even as early as last year. With rumors that Windows 8 is due as early as 2012, we've already started making our wish list for Microsoft's next operating

system.

Seasoned Users Shun Spontaneity on the Web

Spontaneous activity on the Internet is on the wane among experienced users as they shun aimless surfing and plan their online sessions more, according to a study published by Microsoft and two agencies.

The survey found that spontaneous use of the Internet fell to 21 percent in 2009/10 according to diaries kept by users in Brazil, Britain, France and Canada from 39 percent in 2007, when a similar survey was conducted in those countries.

Microsoft and its survey partners, mec and Mindshare, attributed the change in usage patterns to a growing resistance among seasoned Internet users to becoming too dependent on the Web, as well as to greater efficiency.

"I've stopped bringing my laptop into the bedroom at night, as I would just sit there for hours surfing aimlessly," said one French user. Another said: "I spend less time on the Internet but I manage to do much more than before."

In all, more than 7,000 people were surveyed by market research firm Ipsos in 11 countries: in addition to the four above, Spain, Russia, China, India, Japan, Mexico and the United States were added in 2010.

The survey also found that users in emerging economies were far more open to online ads than those in mature markets.

Respondents in mature markets said there was too much online advertising of every kind, while those in emerging markets said they were happy to see more of several types, especially map-based ads and video ads.

"When the Internet is a novelty, even advertising is a novelty," Beth Uyenco, head of research at Microsoft advertising, told Reuters by telephone.

Pop-up ads were the least popular type of online advertising in both mature and emerging markets.

Microsoft made \$1.9 billion in revenue from online advertising in 2010, about 3 percent of its total sales.

Tablets Poised To Replace Waiters' Primary Functions

Sick of long wait times or restaurants? Loathe idle banter? Suffer no more! One startup company called E la Carte (get it? 'E' for electronic. Hah!), is offering tablets which will be able to take your order, entertain you, and accept your payments. They're calling it a "Restaurant Revolution." TouchØ!

The company has so far raised more than 1 million dollars in funding from investors like Y Combinator, and aim to launch their tablets in 20

restaurants on the West coast (yay for me!). You might even see them on your next trip to Applebee's - according to Mashable, the restaurant chain's executives have taken an interest. And E la Carte has the potential to be profitable: E la Carte CEO Rajat Suri claims that customers seated at tables outfitted with their tablets spent 10 to 12% more than those at other tables during the pilot run.

So what does the future of ordering food look like? The tablets allow you to browse the menu, and check out what your meal look like before you order. You can then share what you find with others at the table. Once you and your group find something that you like, the tablet relays your order directly to the kitchen. Not only can you order and pay with the tablet, but you can play social games to entertain your table while you wait.

E la Carte says that the tablet isn't meant to compliment, and not replace the waiter. They'll string bring you your food and help you make decisions if you can't make up your mind after looking at all of that delicious food on the tablet.

Robot apocalypse or not, I for one look forward to ordering my first meal from a tablet.

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